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AUTHOR Nucci, Larry; Turiel, Elliot
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated social interactions and the development of social concepts in preschool children in terms of two conceptual domains, the moral and the societal. The former has to do with concepts of justice and fairness, the latter with social conventions, rules and social organization. Subjects were children 3 to 5 years of age enrolled in ten preschools. Preliminary results include data from observations made at four of these schools. A total of 98 events that involved social conventional or moral transgressions were observed and rated. The data suggests that essential information regarding the injustice of the act is directly available to the actor through the nature of the victims' response. It thus becomes possible for the very young child to construct conceptions of morality. Social connections, however, cannot be discussed in terms of personal loss but rather in relation to the social order. Responses to moral transgressions appear to be qualitatively different from those made to violations of social conventions. It is argued that since there is no difference in intensity of adult responses to moral or social conventional transgressions, the intensity of adult responses cannot be viewed as a salient variable to the child. The data seems to support Piaget's suggestion that it is the peer interactions which are the more salient events in the development of the child's moral reasoning. (MS)

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Social Interactions and the Development of Social Concepts in Pre-School Children

Larry Nucci
~~University of California, Santa Cruz~~
College of Education
University of Illinois
at Chicago Circle

and

Elliot Turiel
University of California,
Santa Cruz

and

Institute of Human Development
University of California, Berkeley

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Social Interactions and the Development

of Social Concepts in Pre-School Children

In this paper we discuss preliminary results from observational research examining one aspect of the social experiences which contribute to the pre-school child's construction of social normative concepts. The research to be presented was conducted within the framework of a model of social development recently proposed by Turiel (1976). In this model, which is outlined in Table 1, Turiel makes a distinction between the individual's concepts and the individual's methods of obtaining information about the social environment. The conceptual frameworks differ from the methods of information gathering. The concepts are ways of structuring the social environment and making inferences about it. The methods are ways of gathering information or data from the environment. Included as methods are observation, communication, imitation, and role taking.

In this model Turiel also distinguishes between three distinct domains of social concepts. These are the moral (justice), the societal (social groupings, social systems and social organizations), and the psychological (attributes of the person and causes of behavior). The developmental basis for the proposition that there exist distinct conceptual domains is the hypothesis that concepts are constructed out of the child's interactions with the environment (Turiel, 1975). A corollary hypothesis is that the types of conceptual frameworks constructed by the child would be influenced by the nature of the environment.

The present research dealt with two of the proposed conceptual domains--the moral and societal. Within this theoretical framework morality is differentiated from concepts of society. One central aspect of social systems is their normative regulation as reflected in custom and convention.

The hypothesis is, therefore, that moral concepts are distinct from concepts about conventions. This implies a narrow definition of morality as justice or fairness. The proposition is that children develop concepts of fairness which apply to a relatively narrow range of issues--such as the value of life, physical and psychological harm to others, trust and responsibility. Concepts of this class of issues are structured by the underlying conceptualization of justice.

Social conventions are included within a separate conceptual domain concerned with different and broader aspects of culture and social organization. These conceptions deal with normative regulation of such issues as family patterns, forms of address, manners, dress codes, sex-roles, sexual mores, and national or religious order and regulation. Concepts about this class of issues are structured by the underlying conceptualization of social organization.

The distinction between morality and convention has been made by Max Weber, in his analyses of social organization. Weber identified three categories of social actions: custom, convention and ethics. Weber used the term custom to refer to actions which are performed with some regularity, but which do not serve a social organizational function and thus are readily alterable. Consequently, customs are not regulated by external sanctions: "Today it is customary every morning to eat a breakfast which, within limits, conforms to a certain pattern. But there is no obligation to do so" (Weber, 1922, p. 122). In contrast, conventions are a significant aspect of the "legitimate order" of social organization and are regulated by sanctions:

> The term convention will be employed to designate that part of the custom followed within a given social group

> which is recognized as 'binding' and protected against violation by sanctions of disapproval. . . . Conformity with convention in such matters of the usual forms of greeting, the mode of dress recognized as appropriate or respectable, and various of the rules governing the restrictions on social intercourse, both in form and in content, is very definitely expected of the individual and regarded as binding on him. (pp. 127-128)

In turn, the conventional is distinct from the ethical:

> Every system of ethics which has in a sociological sense become validly established is likely to be upheld to a large extent by the probability that disapproval will result in its violation, that is, by convention. On the other hand, it is by no means necessary that all conventionally or legally guaranteed forms of order should claim the authority of ethical norms. (p. 130)

This distinction between morality and convention, however, is not one which is generally made by investigators of moral development. Durkheim (1924, 1925), for example, defined morality as respect for society and adherence to the authority, norms, and rules of the collective system. From this viewpoint moral development is seen as a process of enculturation or socialization of the child by caretakers, such as parents or teachers. In viewing all social behaviors and values as the incorporation of externally determined and imposed content theorists such as Durkheim make no conceptual distinctions among different social behaviors. That is, the proposed two categories of moral and conventional are treated as one category. More contemporary examples of this approach can be seen in the work of Aronfreed (1968), and Hogan (1973), among others.

Alternatively there are theorists who maintain that moral development is not internalization, but the construction of universal judgments of right and wrong or good or bad. In this case, it is presumed that moral judgments of right and wrong may apply to any form of social behavior. Consequently the conventional is treated as a sub-class of the moral. An

example of this approach can be seen in the early work of Piaget (1932) on children's moral judgments. Unlike Durkheim, Piaget viewed moral development as progressing toward individual autonomy and mutual respect among equals--which represents the triumph of principle over convention or justice over society. In that formulation, convention is viewed as an inadequate form of morality.

More recently, Kohlberg (1969) has provided descriptions of moral judgment development that are somewhat different from Piaget's descriptions. However, Kohlberg's descriptions also fail to distinguish between moral and societal domains. In Kohlberg's scheme it takes more years and more stages than in Piaget's, but nevertheless, convention is defined as an inadequate form of morality and development is seen as progressing toward the triumph of justice over society.

There is some evidence in support of the proposed distinction between convention and morality. For instance, a recent study we conducted asked subjects from 6 to 17 years of age to rate rules pertaining to moral and conventional issues. The findings were that subjects at each of these ages discriminated between the two types of rules (Turiel 1976). Furthermore, interview studies of children and adolescents have shown that the form of social conventional reasoning changes with age (Turiel 1975, 1976).

The research to be discussed here dealt with younger children--3 to 5 year olds--and with responses to transgressions in a naturalistic setting. The hypothesis underlying the research was that the child forms distinct conceptual frameworks out of different types of social interactions. We assumed that the child's concepts of the social world are not of one kind, but that at a relatively young age, children start to form different conceptual frameworks and thereby discriminate between the moral and

societal domains. It is hypothesized that certain types of experiences lead to concepts about convention and other types of experiences lead to moral concepts. The types of social interactions that are likely to generate justice conceptions would include those situations that entail the infliction of physical or psychological harm by one person upon another. For instance, young children deal with conflicts revolving around children hitting each other or taking possessions from each other. In contrast, social experiences likely to generate concepts concerning social conventions would include situations related to social order and regularity.

The present study marks our initial attempts (a) to gather observational data in support of this developmental model and (b) to identify the different types of social interactions experienced by the young child. The aim was to define the nature of the responses made by adults or other children to a child's social transgressions. It is our hypothesis that responses made to moral transgressions would come more often from peers than from adults and that responses to moral transgressions would focus on the personal loss or injury to the victim of the action and to the attendant feelings and emotional states. In contrast, responses to transgressions of social conventions would most often come from adults and that these responses would consist largely of commands and rule statements intended to generate behavior within the prescribed social order.

Method

Our investigation was conducted at ten pre-schools in the Santa Cruz area. The schools were chosen in order to maximize the variance in class size, social class of the children, and the training and attitudes of the teachers.

Two 90-minute observation periods were conducted at each school. A pair of investigators was used: one served as the observer and the other as an interviewer. The observer's function was to tape record a descriptive narrative of events comprising any observed social transgression and to rate the responses to the transgression on a standard checklist. Descriptions of the major categories comprising the checklist are included in Table 3. At the same time, the second investigator interviewed a child from the pre-school who had observed the event. The child was questioned about his or her conception of the nature of the event. The interview was based on one developed by Turiel (1975) and had as its main objective the determination of the child's perception of the transgression as a moral or social conventional act. The child was considered to have interpreted an act as moral if his statements indicated that the transgressor's action was wrong regardless of the presence or absence of a social rule, and social conventional if the child perceived the act as wrong only if a rule concerning the act was in effect.

The next step was for a trained judge to rate the transcribed descriptions of the observed events. The judge had not served as an observer or interviewer and did not know the hypothesis of the study. An event was scored as moral if it resulted in an injustice: personal injury, loss, breach of promise, etc. An act was scored as social conventional if it violated the social order: creating a mess, improper manners, engaging in an activity not appropriate to a given area of the school (e.g., jumping rope indoors, etc). Then the judge's ratings of the event descriptions were compared with the children's assessment of the events in those cases in which interviews were conducted. Judge's ratings of events as being moral or social conventional based on the observer's

descriptions agree with the classification of events as being moral or social conventional based on the interviews of children in 43 of the 46 events in which children were interviewed.

Results

These preliminary results include data from the first four schools in which observations were conducted. A total of 98 observed events are reported: 50 of which are social conventional and 48 moral. Since these are preliminary results we can only provide descriptive statistics at this time.

Interjudge reliability for observer ratings of the responses to transgressions observed in 37 events ranged from 72 to 100 percent agreement (summarized in Table 4).

Moral Events

a) Adult Responses:

Table 5 shows that 17.5% of the moral transgressions had an adult as the sole respondent. Most of these instances concerned transgressions against the property of individuals who were not observers of the transgression. In total adults responded to moral transgressions 37.5% of the time. It should be pointed out however, that these figures are based on only three schools since teachers at the Montessori school made no responses to moral transgressions. In 23% of the events adult responses consisted of commands to the transgressor. 54% of the events were scored as rationale personal. 39% of the adult responses included attempts by the adult to get the victim to state his/her feelings to the transgressor. In 13% of the observed moral events adults stated feelings on behalf of the victim. In 85% of the events adult responses to moral transgressions were classified as either rationale personal or as falling within one of the

two categories involving the victim's feelings. In only 15% of the events was a command given as the sole response to the transgression. Responses falling within the remaining adult categories occured in less than 7.5% of the events. Average intensity score for adult response to moral transgressions was 1.42; with scores of above 2 occuring 27.5% of the time.

b) Child Responses:

As can be seen in Table 6, 62.5% of cases classified as moral events had a child as the sole respondent; an additional 20% of the cases had both a child and an adult as a respondent for a total of 82.5% of the moral events involving a child as a respondent. Children responding to moral transgressions were almost always the victims of the transgression. 36% of the responses of these children expressed personal injury or loss. In 67% of the instances children responding to moral transgressions did so in an emotional manner including such behavioral displays as angry commands and outbursts of crying. A third of the time children responded to moral transgressions with physical responses such as hitting the transgressor. The extent to which children sought adult intervention varied somewhat from school to school with a low of zero requests to a high of 33% of the events including requests for adult involvement.

Social Conventions

a) Adult Responses:

Table 5 also shows that all but 4 of the events classified as social conventional involved an adult as the sole respondent. In all but the Montessori school commands were involved in 50 to 75% of the events. Montessori teachers achieved the same end by responding to 75% of the social conventional transgressions with requests for appropriate behavior. The combined scores for the request and command categories show these responses

occuring in 71% of the events classified as social conventions. In 31% of the events either a command or a request for prescribed behavior was the sole adult response. 13% of the events included adult statements directly dealing with classroom order. Statement of rules governing the act occured in 24% of the events. In 11% of events adults made statements regarding negative sanctions for rule transgression. Average intensity score for adult response to transgressions of social conventions was 1.45; with scores of above 2 occuring 26% of the time.

b) Child Responses:

Only 4 events involving social conventions involved a child as the respondent. In 3 of the 4 cases the child was directly imitating the response an adult had made to the transgression.

Discussion

The results from this study are in support of the proposal that young children engage in qualitatively different social interactions that correspond to moral and societal concepts. Results from this study indicate that moral transgressions committed by pre-school children invoke responses from both children and adults which focus upon injury or personal loss incurred by the victims of such acts. In most instances children committing moral transgressions are doing so against one of their peers. Such transgressions result in direct and salient responses which provide immediate information regarding the feeling states of the victim. Adult responses to children's moral transgressions are a combination of commands and requests for appropriate conduct with attendant rationales in terms of the victim's personal injury or loss. In addition, the pre-school teachers we observed sometimes acted as facilitators in peer interactions by encouraging the victims to speak directly to the transgressors regarding the feelings

generated by the transgressors' acts. It should be noted, however, that adult responses to child-child moral transgressions occured in only 20% of the moral events. Piaget (1932) has suggested that it is the peer interactions which are the more salient events in the development of the child's moral reasoning. Our data indicate that essential information regarding the injustice of the act is directly available to the actor through the nature of the victim's response. It thus becomes possible for the very young child to construct conceptions of morality.

Social conventions, on the other hand, cannot properly be discussed in terms of personal loss, but rather in relation to the social order. Results from this preliminary research indicate that it is the adult members of society who are the principle respondents to the young child's transgressions of conventions. In large part these responses consist of commands or indirect commands to the child to refrain from norm violating behavior or to direct the child to engage in socially prescribed acts. Often the child is given a statement of the rule governing the act. The reasons most often provided to the child for the existence of social conventions center around the maintenance of classroom order. However, such reasons were provided infrequently. The child's compliance with the social convention was sometimes encouraged through adult statements posing negative sanctions as a result of non-compliance.

To summarize, it is our contention that responses to moral transgressions are qualitatively different from those made to violations of social conventions. On the basis of our findings we can hypothesize that pre-school children construct distinct concepts, which stem from these different types of responses. Since there was no difference in intensity of adult responses to moral or social conventional transgressions, we conclude

that the intensity of adult responses cannot be viewed as a salient variable to the child. Social rule violations as well as moral transgressions can evoke strong emotional responses from adults. We offer the following as an example of a teacher's extreme response to a social transgression and ask the reader's pardon if this instance brings back unpleasant memories.

> "Benji MacMaster, give the crayon to me. After school you're going to take some Ajax and clean that up. That's one of our big rules at achool: you don't draw on things. That's really out of the ordinary. That's ridiculous!"

Moral events result in direct responses from peers (victims) who make direct intense verbal and physical statements regarding their displeasure with the transgressor in terms of their personal loss or injury and attendant emotional states. Adult responses to moral transgressions reiterate those of the victim.

Violations of social conventions result in adult responses consisting primarily of commands to perform socially prescribed acts within the context of social rules intended to maintain social order.

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TABLE 1

Classifications of Social Domains
(Turiel, 1976)

Conceptual Frameworks (Domains)	Methods of Social Information Gathering
1) MORAL Justice; Fairness	Observation
	Communication
2) SOCIETAL Social groupings Social system and organization Convention and custom	Role - taking
	Imitation
3) PSYCHOLOGICAL Attributes of the person (self and others)	

TABLE 2

Procedure

1. a)Investigator 1 observes event, tape records a descriptive narrative of the event and rates the event on observation checklist.
b)Investigator 2 interviews a child in the classroom (who has also seen the event) regarding the nature of the event.

2. a)Judge 1 (trained adult) rates investigator 1's transcribed descriptions of the observed events as moral or conventional
b)Judge 2 (trained adult) scores transcribed interviews of child interpretations of observed events as moral or conventional

(Judges have not served as observers or interviewers.)

Category Definitions

Injury Statement - Any statement indicating pain, injury to person or property, any statement of loss--personal space, property, etc.

Example: 1) "That hurts."

2) "That's mine."

3) "Give it back."

4) "Stop hitting me."

5) "You hurt my feelings."

Emotional Statement - Any statement given with intense affect or any statement indicating emotional state.

Example: 1) Ow!

2) "You make me mad!"

3) "I'm gonna kill you!"

4) "I'm really sad."

5) Crying, etc.

Disorder Statement - Indication that behavior is creating a mess, disorder or chaos.

Example: 1) "It's too noisy in here."

2) "You're getting crumbs all over the floor.

3) "You're making a mess."

Rule Statement - Any statements specifying the rule governing the action.

Example: 1) "We're not allowed to hit at school."

2) "It's clean-up time."

3) "You're not allowed to eat in the block area."

Sanction Statement - Any statement indicating negative response to the behavior- "if-then" statements.

Example: 1) "We can't have snack until we clean up."

2) "If you do that one more time you're going to be punished," etc.

Rationale Personal - Reason for the rule given in terms of personal needs.

Example: 1) "You shouldn't hit because you hurt people."

2) "You should share so that everyone can have some."

Rationale Order - Reason for the rule given in terms of order.

Example: 1) "You shouldn't eat in the block area because it makes a mess."

2) "If you yell inside things become all confused," etc.

Conformity Statement - Everyone should be doing the same thing. Any statement which attempts to compare the individuals behavior with that of others.

Example: 1) "Look how nice everyone is sitting at their tables."

2) "Suzie, try to share and be nice like everyone else."

Command - A clear statement to do or cease from doing something without a statement of rule.

Example: 1) "Get down from there!"

2) "Stop that!"

3) "Everybody clean up!"

Request - Any statement indicating a particular action be taken and phrased in terms of the teacher's personal wish.

Example: 1) "I'd like it if things were not so noisy."

Implies----------->("Be quiet!")

Involve Adult - Any request for teacher intervention, or any statement by a child to an adult describing the misbehavior of another, or any threat to tell the teacher of another's misbehavior.

Example: 1) "I'm telling teacher."

2) "Teacher, Johnny won't let Frank play with the blocks."

3) "Teacher, Suzie's wrecking my picture; tell her to stop it."

Statement Made in Adult Role - Child makes a rule statement in the context of an adult role fantasy.

Example: Girl pretending to be the teacher says, "Joe, I told you to clean up."

Reward - Any "if-then" statement which promises a positive outcome if the behavior is enacted.

Example: 1) "If everybody is quiet we can all have a cookie."

2) "If you apologize to John, you can play outside."

Physical Response - Any physical act taken by an adult or child toward the rule violator.

Examples: Hitting, tickling, shaking, pushing, hugging, etc.

Ask Transgressor to "Use Words" - When teacher attempts to settle dispute by telling rule violator to use words rather than engaging in physical acts.

Example: Child A taking toy from child B. Teacher responds: "A, please tell B you would like to play too, and ask him if he will share with you."

Victim to State Feelings - Teacher attempts to settle disputes by telling victim of transgression to indicate how it feels to be victimized and to direct comments toward transgressor.

Example: A, hit by B. Teacher, "A, tell B how you feel when he hits you."

State Feelings for Vict'm - Teacher tells transgressor how it feels to be the victim of the act.

Example: A takes toy from B. Teacher, "A, B is really upset. It makes him angry when you take his things.

Response Intensity Rating:

1- Teacher responds to transgression in a matter of fact tone of voice at normal conversational level.

2- Teacher expresses mild annoyance or irritation to the transgressor regarding the act.

3- Teacher responds with anger or elevated emotion-chastises or ridicules the the transgressor.

Table 4

CH = Montessori School

CD = UCSC Campus Day Care Center

LF = Community Funded Day Care Center

G = Private Pre-school Through Second Grade

Total Number of Events

	Moral	Social Convention	Total
CH	11	13	24
CD	12	13	25
LF	12	15	27
G	5	7	12
Total	40	58	98

Interjudge Reliability
(37 events)

Percent Agreement

Category	Child	Adult
Command	91	84
Request	-	87
Rule Statement	100	100
Rationale Personal	-	92
Order Statement	-	75
Emotional Response	83	
Statement of Injury or Loss	72	-
Physical Response	89	-
Ask Victims to State Feelings	-	100
State Feelings for Victims	-	100
Intensity of Response	-	92

Table 5

Adult Response

Moral

Category	% of events in which response occurred				Total
	CH	SD	LP	A	
Command	-	25	30	-	23
Request	-	-	16	-	7
Request & Command Only	-	18	16	-	15
Rationale Personal	-	50	50	30	52
Ask Victim to State Feelings	-	-	50	70	39
State Feelings for Victim	-	30	-	-	15
Rule Statement	-	-	16	-	7
Rationale Personal + Feeling Statement					85
% Events Responded to by an Adult Only					17.5
Total % Events Responded to by Adult					37.5

Social Conventional

Category	% of events in which response occurred				Total
	CH	SD	LP	A	
Command	-	50	53	75	41
Request	75	20	27	-	30
Request & Command	75	70	80	75	71
Request & Command Only	25	36	17	50	31
Rule Statement	50	24	40	-	25
Order Statement	25	13	13	-	13
Sanction Statement	-	6	20	12	11

Response Intensity

	Mean Response Intensity	% Responses 2 or Higher
Moral	1.42	22.5
Social Conventional	1.45	20.0

Table 6

Child Responses

Recall

% of events in which response occurred

Category	CH	CD	A	C	Total
Command	64	20	20	20	37
Command Only	-	10	-	-	3
Statement of Injury or Personal Loss	21	50	44	30	36
Emotional Statement	64	70	67	67	67
Physical Response	21	50	22	30	30
Involve Adult	-	30	33	-	18

Summary

Preliminary findings are reported from a study conducted within a model of social development proposing that children's conceptions of morality and social convention are constructed within distinct conceptual domains, and that these constructions arise from qualitatively differing social interactions. This study hypothesized that responses to moral transgressions would differ qualitatively from responses to transgressions of social-convention.

Observations were conducted at ten pre-schools. A pair of investigators was used. One served as observer. This person tape recorded a narrative description of each event, and recorded responses to transgressions on a standard checklist. The second investigator interviewed a child who had observed the event. On the basis of these interviews and the observer's description events were classified as moral or social-conventional.

Findings indicated that moral events result in direct responses from peers (victims) who make direct intense verbal and physical statements regarding their displeasure with the transgressor in terms of their personal loss or injury and attendant emotional states. Adult responses to moral transgressions reiterate those of the victim.

Violations of social conventions result in adult responses consisting primarily of commands to perform socially prescribed acts within the context of social rules intended to maintain social order.